

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 3APHILADELPHIA INQUIRER
27 December 1986

Three back in U.S. after escaping jail and fleeing Brazil

By Joan Mower
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Three American mercenaries who used hacksaw blades to escape earlier this month from a Brazilian prison where they had been held on gun-smuggling charges returned Thursday to the United States. A fourth escapee did not return immediately.

"If we hadn't had hope, we never would have made it," said one of the mercenaries, Timothy Carmody. He and three American mercenaries escaped from the prison on Dec. 15.

Carmody said he now is turning his attention to freeing four colleagues still jailed in Brasilia, Brazil.

The eight American mercenaries, all Vietnam veterans, were arrested March 14 in Brazil aboard a Panamanian-registered tug loaded with machine guns, grenades, inflatable rafts and other military hardware.

The seagoing vessel was loaded with weapons in Argentina and was headed across the Atlantic Ocean to the West African nation of Ghana where, the men said, they were planning to help overthrow the government of President Jerry Rawlings.

Carmody said he believed the mission had U.S. government backing — either from the CIA or the National Security Council.

But the plan went awry when the ship's captain refused to go through with the trip and returned to Brazil, where the men were arrested at a port town 20 miles east of Rio de Janeiro.

They were charged and convicted of smuggling arms into Brazil, but the convictions were overturned by an appeals court in October. The men remained in jail facing extradition to Argentina on charges of violating export laws.

Carmody, 39, who was interviewed by telephone from his home in San Francisco, flew from La Paz, Bolivia, to Miami on Thursday with two of the other escapees — Sheldon Ainsworth of Virginia Beach, Va., and Steven Hedrick of St. Petersburg, Fla.

A fourth man — Fred Verduin of Sonoma, Calif. — escaped with the others and is safe, although he did not return to the United States immediately, Carmody said.

Carmody said that he was paid \$5,000 for the mission and that the man who recruited him lives in Texas.

The plan, Carmody said, was for the Americans to train a force of 100 Ghanaian rebels, apparently on board a freighter after picking them up in the Ivory Coast, Ghana's neighbor. An invasion then would be launched in rubber boats from the ship.

The CIA has denied any involvement in the operation, and the State Department has said the men were operating as free agents.

Pete Martinez, a State Department spokesman, said yesterday that he had no information on the men.

Carmody said the four escapees used hacksaw blades that had been smuggled into the prison in boxes of powdered milk sent by his wife, Melody.

They sawed through a metal grate above a shower, and at 10:30 p.m. Dec. 15, they shimmied down sheets tied together and walked past several prison guards, he said. Once at a main road, they hailed a taxi, paying for it with money that had been hidden inside a cigarette pack.

Those who stayed behind considered the plan too risky, Carmody said.

He said the escape plan had been worked out for months by his brother.

Brazilian television broadcast their pictures every evening, Carmody said. "We stayed in out-of-the-way places," he said, adding that they got by with a road map and a Portuguese phrase book.

After traveling by taxi and bush-plane for a week, the men reached Corumba, a Brazilian town about 700 miles southwest of Brasilia. They crossed by border into Bolivia.

Those remaining in custody were Steven Sosa, of Fayetteville, N.C.; Julio Rodriguez-Larrazabal, also of Fayetteville; John Dee Early of Florida, and Robert Edward Foti of Scotia, N.Y. Early's home town was not available.